



U.S. Department of Transportation
National Highway Traffic Safety
Administration

NHTSA
People Saving People
www.nhtsa.dot.gov

What a Difference Five Years Made!

1994–Present

Positioned Traffic Injuries as a Public Health Problem, Both Domestically and Internationally

Goal 1: Lead the effort to make traffic and motor vehicle safety a priority of the nation's health care agenda.

The Federal government has recognized that motor vehicle-related deaths and injuries are a major public health problem. NHTSA has a lead role in making motor vehicle safety a priority of the nation's health care agenda. We do this by conducting research to improve motor vehicle and highway safety, determining specific motor vehicle and highway safety problems that need to be addressed, putting into effect programs to address these problems, setting motor vehicle safety standards for the manufacturers of new motor vehicles and equipment, and evaluating the results of our efforts.

—Ricardo Martinez, M.D., NHTSA Administrator, remarks before the subcommittee on Telecommunications, Trade and Consumer Protection, House Committee on Commerce, May, 1997

Positioning injuries as a public health problem has come full circle since Dr. Haddon, NHTSA's first Administrator was in office in 1966. After the agency's creation due to public concerns about highway fatalities, engineering advances took front and center in the business of protecting vehicle passengers. Now, after 30 years, the public health aspects of traffic safety are once again gaining renewed attention.

A Comprehensive Approach: prevention, acute care and rehabilitation.

The burden of heart disease has been drastically reduced in our lifetime because doctors have used such a comprehensive approach. Any one of these approaches alone would not have yielded the same benefits as *all three working together*. The same can be said for the disease called motor vehicle injury.

While motor vehicles may not at first seem to qualify as a "health" problem, the sheer magnitude of fatalities warrants national attention:

Between the ages of 15–24, the single largest cause of death is car crashes, accounting for 33% of all fatalities, and nearly 4 times the mortality rate for cancer and heart disease combined.

The statistics are equally compelling for children up to age 15. Forty percent of children's deaths are from unintentional injuries, and one-half of these are from car crashes, making cars the leading killer of children too.

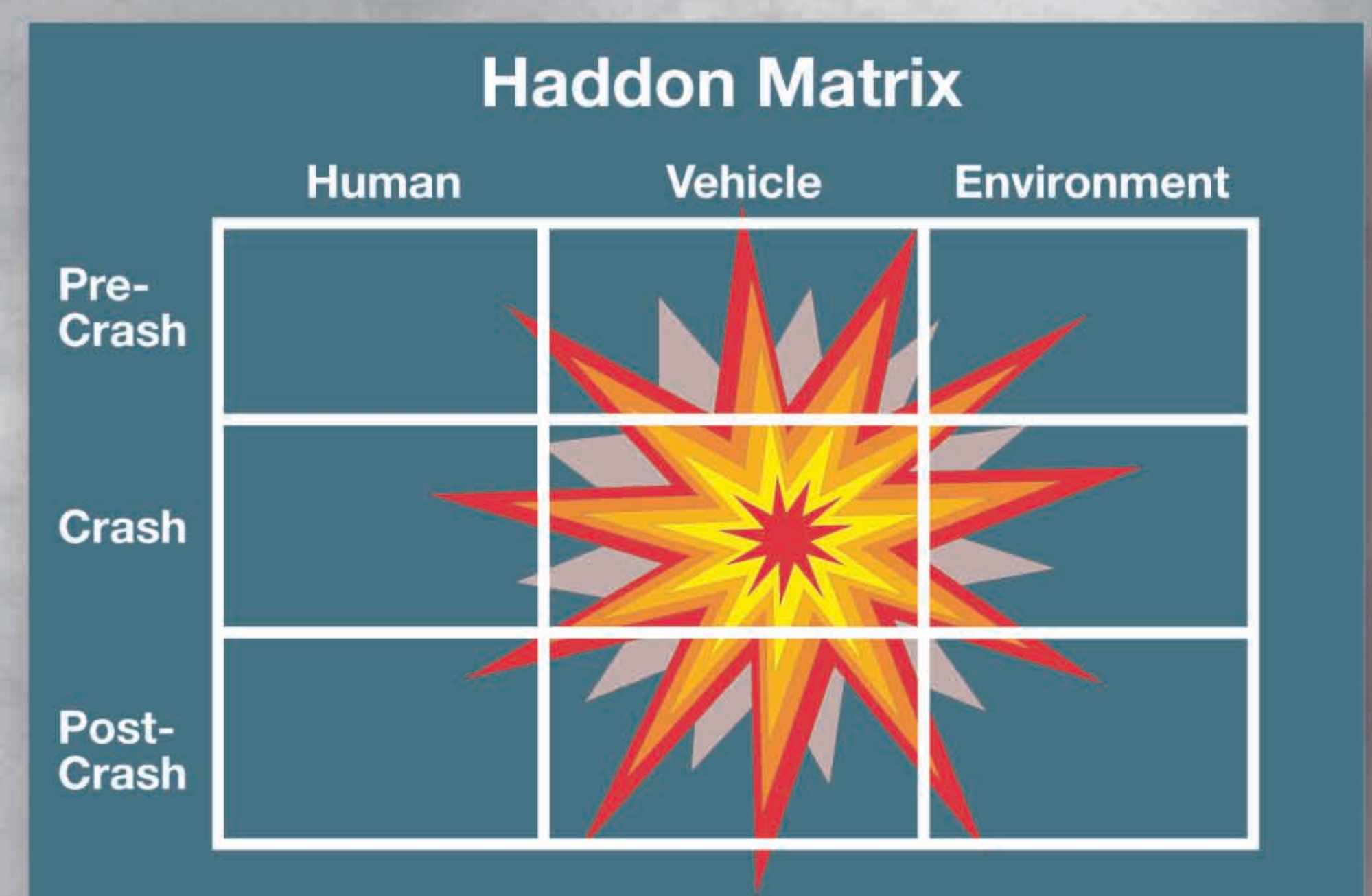
Many (but certainly not all) of NHTSA's activities fall into the prevention category. Wearing a seat belt or a motorcycle helmet, properly using a child safety seat, not drinking and driving, obeying a safe speed, are all examples of preventive actions that yield major benefits. Adopting these relatively easy public health interventions yields immediate results with minimal effort.

Other NHTSA responsibilities, such as establishing emergency medical services systems and development of vehicle engineering solutions cannot be overlooked for the tremendous contributions they have made to improving the public's well-being.

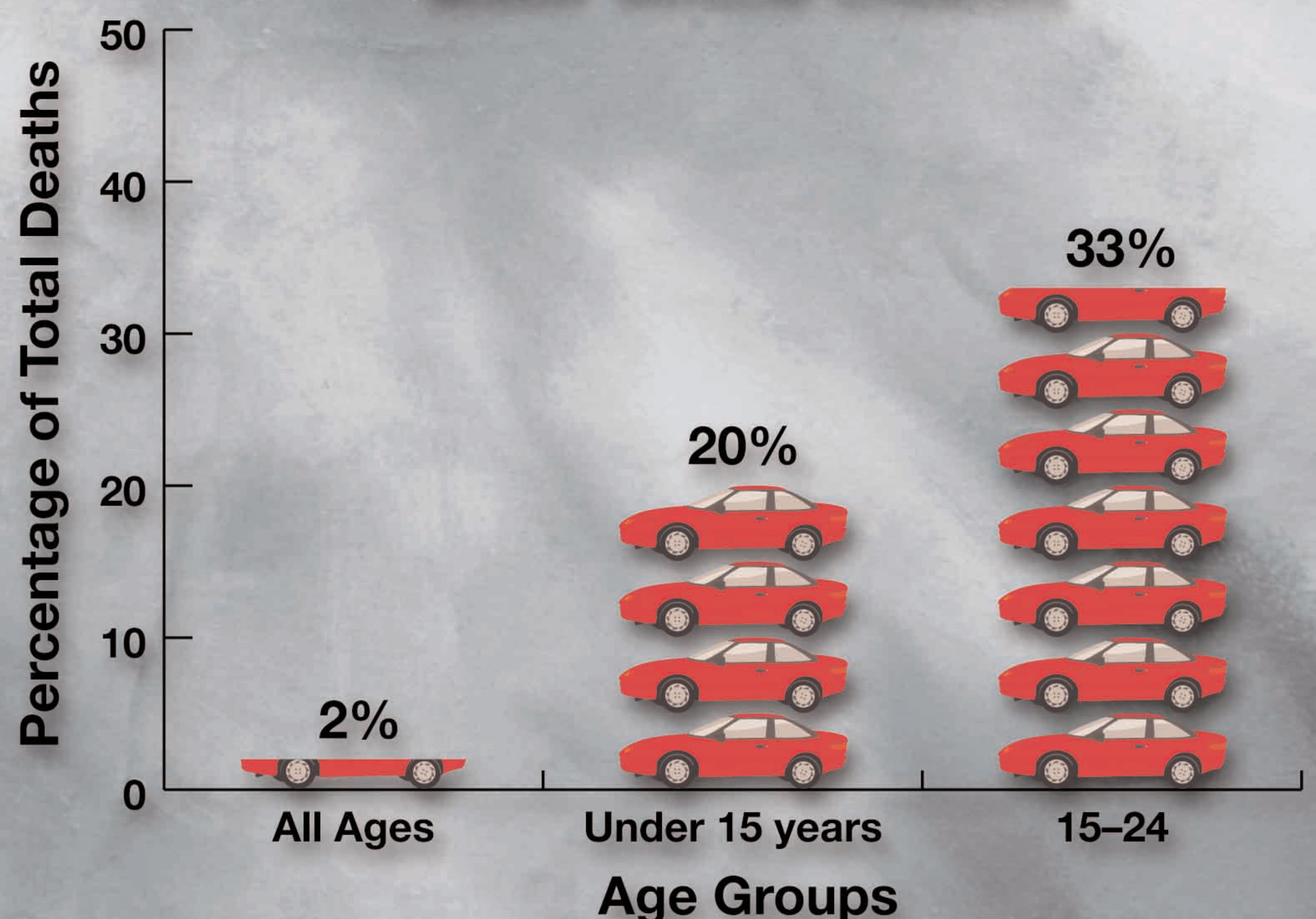
Working with our injury prevention partners across the nation is generating the comprehensive approach that has been so successful in combating heart disease.

- Following the public health model
 - engaging practitioners from acute care and rehabilitation in prevention efforts
 - using data to measure and identify problems and evaluate interventions
 - implementing local solutions to local problems
- these constitute public health approaches to the traffic injury epidemic.

"Thanks to everyone at NHTSA who has been working in the public health field — whether they knew it or not! Several outstanding successes have been achieved." Joan Harns, office of the Administrator



Percentage of Deaths from Motor Vehicle Crashes



Source: NCHS, Nov. 10, 1998



"Team work is the heart of any successful operation. When we set our goals in the Strategic Plan back in 1994, we built in a foundation that empowered the NHTSA employee and sparked individual creativity and innovation. The resulting accomplishments of working as a team over the past half decade have been nothing short of magnificent. Everyone at NHTSA should feel we are moving forward. Because we are. Each one of you should feel very proud of your individual contributions to the overall momentum that is making highways safer for us all. We are, after all, people saving people. It's what we do — and what all of you do so well."

Ricardo Martinez

Congratulations and Thank You to All Members of the NHTSA Family for a Job Well Done!

John A. ...
Rae A. ...
Ken Weinstein
Rae Tyson
Ray ...
James ...
Charles ...
Adel ...